

CITATION

**ARDLAIR - LETTEREWE
SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST
HIGHLAND (Wester Ross)**

Site code: 73

NATIONAL GRID REFERENCE: NG 980730

OS 1:50,000 SHEET NO: Landranger Series 19
1:25,000 SHEET NO: Explorer Series 433, 434, 435

AREA: 9312.05 hectares.

NOTIFIED NATURAL FEATURES

Biological: Woodlands: Upland oak woodland
Biological: Woodlands: Upland birch woodland
Biological: Upland habitats: Upland assemblage

DESCRIPTION

Ardlair – Letterewe SSSI is an extensive upland site arising from the north-eastern shoreline of Loch Maree taking in the Letterewe Forest and part of the Fisherfield Forest., and is located between the settlements of Kinlochewe and Poolewe in Wester Ross. It is notified for its mosaic of upland habitats and woodland habitats.

The woodland which occurs along the south facing slopes above Loch Maree is the most northerly example of a large oakwood in the UK and is thought to have had a continuous cover of native trees since re-colonisation after the ice age. Oak *Quercus petraea* is dominant but areas with flushed soils also support ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, hazel *Corylus avellana* and alder *Alnus glutinosa*. Small numbers of Scots pine *Pinus sylvestris* occur on crags and on more acid soils. Ground flora is typical of upland oak-birchwoods and is species poor. The crags and areas dominated by pine have a dwarf shrub heath ground layer. The richest herb layer occurs under ash-hazel and ash-alder.

Woodland dominated by birch *Betula pendula* has developed to the west of the site by Ardlair. Associated species include guelder rose *Viburnum opulus*, wych elm *Ulmus glabra*, aspen *Populus tremula*, holly *Ilex aquifolium* and sessile oak *Quercus petraea*. The ground flora here is exceptionally species rich and has abundant false-brome grass *Brachypodium sylvaticum*.

The site supports a diverse mosaic of upland habitats including subalpine wet heath, subalpine dry heath, alpine heath, alpine moss heath, calcareous grasslands, snowbeds, tall herb ledges, blanket bog and rocky slopes. These features are distributed across a large montane area where underlying Lewisian rocks give rise to both acidic and calcareous conditions and there is a small outcrop of Durness Limestone, which gives rise to a rich and varied flora.

The lower ground is mainly dominated by wet heath and blanket mire. Exposed middle slopes support prostrate dwarf shrub heath with woolly hair moss

Racomitrium lanuginosum and crowberry *Empetrum nigrum*. Quartzite occurs to the east of Sgurr Ban and here the dwarf shrub heath is dominated by dwarf juniper *Juniper communis* subsp. *nana*. Where calcareous exposures occur, calcareous grassland and flushes are found with species such as mountain sorrel *Oxyria digyna*, globe flower *Trollius europaeus* and alpine cinquefoil *Potentilla crantzii*. Moss heath dominates the upper slopes and summits with cushion herbs including moss campion *Silene acaulis*. There is good development of North Atlantic liverworts on some north facing slopes and, in areas where snow persists late, snow bed communities occur with a range of species including parsley fern *Cryptogramma crispa* and trailing azalea *Loiseleuria procumbens*. Many of the cliffs have ledges supporting tall herb communities with mountain avens *Dryas octopetala*.

NOTIFICATION HISTORY

Part notified under the 1949 Act as Letterewe Oakwoods SSSI in 1963 and 1974.

Part notified under the 1949 Act as Letterewe Forest SSSI in 1974.

Re-notified under the 1981 Act: 24 October 1986 as Ardlair - Letterewe SSSI incorporating both SSSIs plus a 1483 ha increase in area.

Notification reviewed under the 2004 Act: 3 November 2010

REMARKS

Measured area of site corrected from 9297.5 ha

Part of Ardlair - Letterewe SSSI is part of Loch Maree Complex Special Area of Conservation (SAC) designated for the European habitats and species listed below.

Habitats:

- Acidic scree
- Alder woodland on floodplains
- Alpine and subalpine heaths
- Blanket bog
- Bog woodland
- Caledonian forest
- Clear-water lakes or lochs with aquatic vegetation and poor to moderate nutrient levels
- Depressions on peat substrates
- Dry heaths
- Montane acid grasslands
- Plants in crevices on acid rocks
- Plants in crevices on base-rich rocks
- Tall herb communities
- Western acidic oak woodland
- Wet heathland with cross-leaved heath

Species: Otter *Lutra lutra*

Part of Ardlair - Letterewe SSSI is also part of Little Gruinard River SAC designated for the European species, Atlantic salmon *Salmo salar*

Part of Ardlair - Letterewe SSSI is also part of Wester Ross Lochs Special Protection Area (SPA) designated for the breeding bird, black-throated diver *Gavia arctica*.